



Dale Givens, Secretary
Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality

Message from the Secretary

The new millennium, while much celebrated a year ago, is really here! During the past couple of years, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has undertaken a major reengineering of many of our core processes with the idea of becoming more efficient and providing better services to the citizens of Louisiana. We knew that to accomplish our mission in the new century we would have to better utilize our resources, use new technology to help accomplish our goals in a time of tight budgets and governmental downsizing. Literally, we would have to accomplish more with less. DEQ is ready to take on the challenges of the new millennium.

Great strides have been made towards completion of our new document imaging system. Any of the hundreds of thousands of pages of documents from our file rooms that have been scanned can now be accessed through the ALPS software. While visitors to DEQ's main office can now view those documents on the Agency's computers, when the system is complete, we expect to make the documents available "online." This will provide a tremendous increase in document accessibility to both department per-

sonnel and the general public. The imaging system is a part of the new Integrated Data Management System (IDMS) being completed by DEQ and is an example of the use of technology in meeting today's demands for information – and how we will be able to keep up with the needs for quality and timely information into the future.

Critical to DEQ's mission is not only having quality information to aid in our decision making processes – but communicating that information effectively to our customers, the citizens of Louisiana. To help accomplish this need, DEQ has implemented a new "Joint Public Hearings" procedure. The procedure allows everyone involved with (or concerned about) a permit application or draft permit to voice any concerns they may have through a two-way dialogue with the Agency.

Much of the subject matter in this issue of the magazine concerns the Office of Environmental Services. Please continue to let us know your suggestions for information you would like to see in future issues.

Dale Givens
Secretary

Department of Environmental Quality Improves Public Access

DEQ's Office of Environmental Services recently initiated an effort to encourage more active public participation in the permitting process. The new services sprang from the Department's reengineering and stays true to the organizational efforts of making the Agency more accessible to the public and more efficient in its work.

The new public outreach programs began with the introduction of the Public Participation Workshop held on April 8, 2000 in Sulphur. Citizens attended the meeting to learn about air permitting issues and how the public can get involved in the process. DEQ staff and officials from EPA, Region VI, gave presentations on the role of each agency in the permitting process and explained in great detail how the public can participate and respond to permits that are being considered for approval. The workshop succeeded in its goals and DEQ is considering holding similar meetings throughout the state in 2001.

Joint Public Hearings

DEQ's outreach continues with the creation and implementation of Joint Public Hearings. At these meetings, the public can discuss related issues associated with draft permits for a facility. When feasible, all permits within the Agency and possible permits from other departments (Department of Natural Resources, US Army Corps of Engineers, etc.) are presented simultaneously. These joint hearings provide a "big picture" focus for individuals wishing to comment on related permit applications from facilities. Information on the permitting process is available and DEQ provides a forum to respond to media questions or comments on a facility's permit activity.



Lou Buatt (center), DEQ staff attorney, officiates as the Hearing Officer at a public hearing in Alsen.



Julie Roussel, an Environmental Specialist in the Permits Division, gives a presentation to the public at DEQ's first Permitting Workshop in Sulphur.

Public Notice Format

The Office of Environmental Services has also created a new public notice format to make the information contained in the notice document easier for non-technical people to read. The Department created a standardized public notice for all media (air, water, soil, etc.) so the public will become familiar with one format instead of many. This will increase participation in the permitting process and enable the public to more readily identify a DEQ public notice in the legal section of the newspaper.

File Room Consolidation

In keeping with the standard of accessibility, DEQ is in the process of consolidating all six of its file rooms into one room on the fourth floor. A computer database housing all of DEQ's documents will allow the public to view

records relating to permitting activities such as public notices and draft permits under consideration. **The new Public Records Room is located in room 4400 and is open every business day from 7:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.** Two attendants are there at all times to assist members of the public with searching and retrieving information on the computers.

Web Site

DEQ's improved web site gives the public another option for finding information. The Office of Environmental Services specifically designed a Public Notice Web Page to give more people access to daily activities in permitting. The page gives the public a first hand view of all public notices, including specific information like comment deadlines, public hearing dates, and DEQ contact numbers. The link can be found at www.deq.state.la.us/News/PubNotice/

